

An Empirical Study of Blended Teaching Mode in ESP Teaching Practice

HAN Jia-jia

Binzhou University, Binzhou, China

Traditional college English teaching ideas and methods cannot meet the current needs of talents in modern society; simultaneously, with the continuous deepening of college English teaching reform, ESP (English for Specific Purpose) has become the mainstream of English teaching and research. While Blended Learning combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods, which are of great significance to change the traditional ESP classroom teaching mode, it will significantly improve the effects of English teaching. In this study, ESP Blended Instruction Mode at School of Flight Training in Binzhou University is taken as the research object, and the empirical research is conducted by means of questionnaire survey. The experiment shows that the Blended Instruction Mode has more advantages in improving college students' ESP application ability and is helpful to stimulate their interest in learning, and further enhance their ESP listening, speaking, reading, and writing performance. Teachers have also been greatly improved in this teaching mode, and more targeted suggestions have been put forward.

Keywords: Blended Teaching Mode, ESP (English for Specific Purpose), empirical research

Introduction

As an important part of college curriculum, ESP (English for Specific Purpose) has many characteristics such as highly professional, boring, and so on. As a result, traditional teaching methods are getting more and more difficult in ESP teaching. With the rapid development of Internet technology and popularization of a large number of digital mobile devices, human society has entered a brand new era of Internet. Internet technology undoubtedly provides a broader space for college English teaching, but it also poses a more serious challenge to the times. Under this background, the concept of Blended Learning or Teaching came into being. This model combines online learning with classroom face-to-face teaching, and can theoretically form complementary advantages of these two modes, so more and more researchers pay more attention to it. However, this mode has rarely been reported in practical teaching and application. This study intends to build the ESP Blended Teaching Mode under the background of the Internet, and conducts experimental research so as to analyze the reasons that affect the Blended Instruction. Based on this, some countermeasures are proposed to improve the quality of ESP teaching.

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HAN Jia-jia, master, lecturer, School of Flight Training, Binzhou University, Binzhou, China.

Blended Learning Theory

Professor He Kekang (2004a, pp. 23-35) said: “The so-called Blending Learning is the combination of the advantages of traditional learning methods and E-learning (i.e., digital or network learning)”. The teacher should play a dominated role in guiding, inspiring, and monitoring the teaching process, simultaneously giving full play to students’ initiative, enthusiasm, and creativity in the process of learning. Only by combining the two can we reinforce complementary advantages, thus achieving the best learning result.

The traditional educational thought of classroom teaching mode regards teachers as the center, neglects the initiative of the students, and is a cramming teaching method. In the process of teaching, both teachers and students should perform their own duties instead of being over their own. Now, it is advocated that Blending Learning emphasizes the combination of the two. Obviously, this is a major shift in educational thinking and teaching concepts in the international educational technology community.

The Blended Learning is a new type of teaching strategy based on the web environment in the current era. It can make the learning time, learning style, learning technology, learning ability, and learning effect be integrated in a diversified way in order to optimize the efficiency of the learning process. Blended Instruction is considered by many scholars to be an inspiring, monitoring, and instructional teaching activity in the context of multiple resource modules. It combines educational theory with educational technology, and expands in both the student’s learning and thinking space, indirectly cultivating the learner’s self-monitoring ability, and ultimately improving the teaching effect. At the same time, Blended Learning increases the flexibility of learners in all aspects of the learning process, such as learning time, learning location, learning speed, and learning path, which will change according to the change of the learning subject. In the process of learning, teaching and student learning are an interactive process, which is also in line with the Blended Learning Theory.

Literature Review

ESP refers to English for Specific Purpose. It is not only a new discipline, but also a teaching organization itself. “Specialization” refers to the purpose, not the language itself.

In the 1960s, the publishment of Strevens’ book *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Learning* (1964) and Ewer’s ESP textbook *A Course in Basic Science English* (1969) symbolized the beginning of ESP study (Hutchinson & Waters, 2002, pp. 9-10).

During the past half century, ESP research in foreign countries has made remarkable progress. Currently in major universities of Europe and the United States, ESP studies mainly come in the form of Academic English and Professional English. The researchers are mainly English teachers, teaching both English majors and non-English majors. Research areas cover all aspects of ESP research practice such as ESP classification, teaching methods, requirements analysis, textbook design, teacher training, corpus research, and assessment testing (Gu, 2010, pp. 25-29).

In the 1980s, China’s ESP study gradually emerged due to the need of foreign exchanges in the fields of natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, and so on. According to statistics collected by Jiang Yichao (2010, pp. 104-109), on the related articles of ESP from 1985 to 2008, “There are at least 110 ESP research articles in at least 10 core journals of foreign languages”, and the total number of articles published in the general core journals and ordinary journals is even greater. However, it must be admitted that most of ESP studies in our

country are based on linguistics and related theories or introduction of research trends in foreign ESP studies.

To sum up, ESP application research in foreign countries has gradually entered the field of demand-centered practical researches such as “Academic English” and “Professional English” from ESP theoretical research. Domestic ESP research is gradually shifting from introducing ESP theory in the west as well as emphasizing the importance of ESP to ESP case studies and analyzing the problems of ESP application as well as putting forward solutions. However, on the whole, the domestic ESP research needs to be strengthened in terms of practical research, especially the case study of specific applied research.

Research Design

Research Purposes

The main purpose of this study is to verify the subjective value of the Blended Teaching Mode in mobilizing students' initiative and creativity of learning English and to verify whether teachers can play a leading role in the Blended Teaching Mode.

Research Question

To verify the effectiveness of the college ESP Blended Teaching Mode, we conducted a one-semester experiment. The experimental hypotheses are as follows:

(1) Is the Blended Teaching Mode more advantageous than the traditional classroom teaching mode in improving the students' ESP application ability and academic performance?

(2) The Blended Teaching Mode can not only improve the ESP ability of students but also improve the comprehensive English knowledge level.

Subjects

The subjects selected in this study were 54 sophomores of Binzhou University majoring flight technology, and then randomly divided them into two classes. Two classes are taught by the same teacher, and have the same teaching hours and teaching conditions. Among the 50 students, 90% had computers, of which 50% had laptops equipped with wireless Internet access, and 100% of students have internet access, smart phones, or other kinds of digital learning machines.

Instruments

Questionnaire. Before the experiment, we obtained students' ESP learning ability through the questionnaire. After the experiment, we used the questionnaire to investigate the impact of Blended Teaching Mode on ESP learners' learning ability.

Interview. After interviews with teachers, we know the problems they face during the teaching process and how to solve them, and discuss the feasibility of promoting this ESP teaching model in a wide range. While interviews with the students help us understand the students' adaptability to this model, it will improve and perfect this teaching model in the future.

Procedures

This study takes a lesson (45 minutes) as an example, and the experimental class adopted a Blended Teaching Mode while control class adopted the traditional teaching mode. Before the experiment, the English listening, speaking, and comprehensive knowledge pre-tests were conducted. After two months' experiment, a pro-test was conducted for comparison and questionnaires were sent to students as well as teachers; besides,

interviews were also arranged simultaneously so as to know their evaluation of the teaching and learning effect of these two kinds of teaching modes.

Data Collection and Results Analysis

Test results analysis. Before the start of the experiment, we randomly selected the experimental class and the control class and conducted the pre-test. The statistical results are shown in Table 1. As can be seen from Table 1, before the experiment, the average listening score difference of the two classes was 0.14, oral was 0.13, reading was 0.19, and writing was 0.27, thus there is no significant difference. However, after two months' experiment, as can be seen from Table 2, both the experiment class and the control class have improved their listening, speaking, intensive reading, and writing performance. Among them, the average score of listening comprehension test in experimental class was increased by 7.73, control class was increased by 2.78, and the difference was 4.95; average score of oral test in the experimental class was increased by 13.37, control class was 5.44, and the difference was 7.93; the average score of reading test in the experimental class was increased by 8.5, control class was 1.71, and the difference was 6.9; the average score of writing test in the experimental class was increased by 9.17, control class was 3.16, and the difference was 6.01. Thus, the pre-test results show clearly that the experimental class and control class had obvious difference in score improvement.

Table 1

Students' Pre-test Score Statistics

Scores	Class	Number	Average
Listening	Experiment class	40	75.62
	Control class	40	75.48
Speaking	Experiment class	40	65.25
	Control class	40	65.12
Reading	Experiment class	40	81.23
	Control class	40	81.04
Writing	Experiment class	40	72.45
	Control class	40	72.18

Table 2

Students' Pro-test Score Statistics

Scores	Class	Number	Average
Listening	Experiment class	40	83.35
	Control class	40	78.26
Speaking	Experiment class	40	78.62
	Control class	40	70.56
Reading	Experiment class	40	89.73
	Control class	40	82.75
Writing	Experiment class	40	81.62
	Control class	40	75.34

Through the questionnaire and interview survey of teachers and students involved in Blended Teaching, it is found that teachers and students have a deeper understanding of the advantages of this kind teaching mode than traditional college English teaching. Teachers and students generally agree that teachers can not only greatly stimulate their interest in learning English courses, but students' self-learning ability has also been significantly improved under Blended Teaching Mode. And the leading role of teachers in the teaching process

can also be fully reflected; the teaching effect has also been significantly improved compared with the traditional course teaching.

Findings

1. From students' perspective:

(1) Students basically have no barriers to the use of Internet devices, and the application of Internet technology makes ESP learning more flexible, because students can make full use of after-hours for effective learning anytime, anywhere.

(2) Most students think the preview part which can be prepared in advance for the contents of class by use of internet is quite necessary and beneficial. It can not only help some shy and inferior students to overcome their psychological barrier, but also make the interaction between teachers and students or among students be conducted in depth.

(3) The combination of learning content with the real work situation can stimulate students' interest in learning English. Most students think that ESP language training helps students to accumulate professional vocabulary and promote the improvement of ESP comprehensive application ability.

2. From perspective of teachers:

Teachers experience mainly in the following aspects:

(1) Blended Teaching and Learning Mode cultivates the feelings of teachers and students and is conducive to carry out personalized teaching.

(2) Formative evaluation makes students be willing to participate in interactive activities; the classroom atmosphere is more active.

(3) In the process of preparing learning contents such as video and audio clips and carrying out bracket-based teaching, teachers further enriched their professional knowledge and teaching experience, which was rare in previous teaching.

Implications

First of all, under the Blended Instruction, in order to ensure the integrity of the entire teaching process, teaching process and teaching design must follow the teaching objectives; only in this way can the continuity of teaching and learning process be guaranteed.

Second, teachers should know clearly the relations between online teaching and classroom teaching. Classroom teaching is mainly focused on teaching materials, while online teaching is mainly to highlight the extension of extra-curricular knowledge.

Third, teachers should ensure that online teaching and classroom teaching have good complementarity and try their best to ensure that the effects of teaching and learning can be maximized.

Finally, in the process of Blended Instruction, both teachers and students should develop the habit of continuous reflection and constantly find deficiencies in the teaching and learning process so as to improve the teaching and learning effects through problem improvement.

In response to the status quo, universities should provide teachers with a full range of school-based training in terms of Blended Teaching concepts, skills of curriculum utilization and development, and teaching activities' design and implementation. This kind of training should be conducted in a combination of theory and practice, focusing on showing teachers a variety of cases of Blended Instruction, so as to provide a reference paradigm for teachers' further development.

Conclusion

In the background of Internet, the Blended Instruction of ESP is the inevitable choice to cope with the change of the times. In fact, using the advantages of Internet technology to build a Blended Teaching and Learning environment can improve the efficiency, effects, and benefits of learning, which is a beneficial attempt to deeply integrate information technology with the curriculum. This study constructed an ESP Blended Teaching Mode, conducted empirical research, and put forward the counter measures to promote Blended Teaching. In view of the shortcomings of this study, similar studies should further optimize this teaching model in the future, expand the scope of practical samples and research as much as possible, and implement more rigorous teaching and experimental research to enhance the scientific and universality of the research results.

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